ABSTRACT

OF THE

REPUBLICS

OF

ANTIQUITY.

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To rectify unstable, or visionary ideas on the subject of politicks: to regulate opinion by a just criterion: and to fix it on the basis of a liberal and solid Government, were alone the motives which induced the Author, to sketch these imperfect outlines of the Ancient Republics. Impressed with such ideas, he has drawn a paralel between the Constitution of each of those celebrated States, and the spirit and embodied form of that finely devised system, the limited Monarchy of Britain. And he calls on every Briton, and on every man of thought, while holding the balance of opinion, to discriminate with candour, and to form a solid judgement on so interesting a subject, and at so important a crisis.

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Republic of Sparta

THE wisdom, and virtue of a pre-eminent mind, erected this Republic on a basis so solid, as to secure its independence, to render it the terror of its neighbours, and transmit it a political phenomenon to the admiration of ages.

Lucurgus, on the unanimous call of the people, returned to Sparta. He found the government of his country divided between two hereditary monarchs, and a disorderly populace. As a barrier conducive to publick tranquillity, no intermediate and balancing power had been established. To rectify this evil, Lycurgus appointed a Senate, vested with such a degree of authority, as might curb the ambition of the one, or the wild excesses of the other. He left to the Kings their ancient externals of royalty; but their authority he limitted to the concerns of religion and war. He allotted to the people the privilege of electing the Senators, and of ratifying those laws, which the Kings and the Senate might enact.

With a Constitution so balanced, each part of the State being vested with powers distinct and restrictive, it was still farther necessary, that the manners of the people should preserve a similitude.

To avoid the extremes of opulence and indigence, he divided the territory of Sparta into equal proportions; * and he enjoined, that all the citizens without distinction should eat at the public tables. Even the Kings were not exempted from so levelling an ordinance. Their diet was simple, was regulated by law, and equally distributed; and the expence was monthly defrayed by an equal contribution levied upon each individual. Not only in their diet, but likewise in their houses and dress, a perfect equality subsisted. To check the acquirement of wealth he prohibited the coinage of gold and silver; and in the place of those metals, he substituted that of Iron. Navigation and commerce he absolutely precluded, and allowed as little intercourse as possible with foreigners. Agriculture, and the mechanick arts, were confined to the Helotes, their slaves.

Having thus effected an entire change in the Spartan manners, Lycurgus attempted by the education of their youth, and by wise institutions congenial with the plan he had adopted, to transmit those manners to distant posterity. Simple in their habits, and disciplined in the regimen of stern obedience, the Spartans were rendered a nation of Soldiers, and an iron rampart of national defence. In fine,

Lycurgus

* 39000 Shares.

Lycurgus nurtured in the citizens of Sparta those manly Ideas, and sentiments of freedom, which as long as they existed, contributed to their glory, to their safety and their happiness.

Thus was the Constitution of Sparta apparently fixed upon solid foundations. But an evil occurred, which undermined that equipoised fabrick. This was the institution of the *Ephori*. They were five in number, and elected by the people. These magistrates being in general indigent, were easily rendered corrupt; and aided by the power of the people, they assumed at length an authority so tyrannical; they so intrenched on the rights of the Kings, and the Senate, as to shake from its centre the constitution of Sparta.

An influx of wealth, obtained by conquest or rapine, and the consequent corruption of manners, must no doubt have contributed as secondary agents, to the ruin which the *Ephori* brought upon their Country.

Thus have we seen, that while Sparta was governed by Institutions, however stern they might be, yet congenial with the aims of Lycurgus, she continued through a lengthened period* powerful and happy. But when she deserted original principles; when she broke the solid barriers erected by his wisdom, a tide of corruption diffusive and rapid, flowed on her manners, and sapped the foundation

*500 Years.

dation of her greatneſs. The Ephori we have noticed, as the Tribunes of the people, controlling the conſtituted Authorities, and aſſuming a power inconſiſtent with the laws: we have ſeen a ſeries of evils reſulting from their conduct highly prejudicial to the State; and levelling with the ground that due equilibrium of power, upon the baſis of which had been founded the ſolid Arch of the Spartan Republic.

Thus fell a diſtinguiſhed Republic: exhibiting in her fall this uſeful admonition to nations: that if the principles which firſt excited the ſentiments of freedom, and which raiſed into elevation the grandeur of a Nation, are not ſtrictly adhered to, and ardently purſued, ſuch nations may with Sparta have a like cauſe to deplore the loſs of their freedom, and the extinction of Empire.

Republic of Athens.

FROM the simple manners, the rigid economy, and saturnine temper of the Spartan, we turn to the gay, to the ardent, the versatile Athenian.

It is said, that the manners of a people create their laws; and, in consequence, that their Constitution varies with the changes in their manners. The fluctuations which Athens exhibited will clearly evince the position. More variable in their systems of government than any other people, the effect of a versatile spirit, the Athenians were more frequently the victims of intrigue, and perhaps exhibited wilder features of anarchy than any other nation

Monarchy appears to have been the first Institution established in Athens. That form was succeeded by a genuine Democracy. To annihilate anarchy or to controul its excesses, and its consequent miseries, the laws of Draco were instituted. Those laws, too cruel

for endurance, were rendered inefficient by their indiscriminate dispensations, and by their sanguinary spirit. In this stage of manners, Solon was called by the Athenians to the perilous task of regulating their government.

The supreme power of the State, at that period, was vested in nine Magistrates, termed Archons, elected by the people every year from the body of the Nobles. These magistrates Solon continued; but he restricted their power by the institution of a Senate: the members of which were elected by the citizens out of the four tribes into which the community was divided. He also revived the court of *Areopagus;* a tribunal esteemed the most respectable in Greece.

The laws of Athens were rigorous in the extreme against insolvent debtors. To redress this grievance, and to soothe the spirits of the people, Solon suggested the dangerous expedient of cancelling debts. This edict at first excited the public indignation: but it was soon after received by the citizens, and quietly submitted to.

The resistance to this measure gave Solon an insight into the temper of the Athenians. He therefore, determined to regulate his laws agreeably to their genius. He confined to the Nobles, and to the opulent citizens the high Offices of State, and the executive Government; but he vested in the people the deliberative power, and the supreme authority. It was this plenitude of power, lodged in the hands of the populace, and unchecked by any effectual controul, which engendered that spirit of Intrigue, and that variety of evils; which, after having long perturbed the Republic, at length undermined the

pillars

pillars of its safety. In vain was the Senate established, and the court of Areopagus revived: the one, to regulate the fury of the people, and their varying temper; and the other, to restrain the ambitious encroachments of the opulent.

The laws which Solon enacted were soon found not to be sufficiently cogent; either to regulate manners, or to preserve the existing constitution. For Pisistratus having gained the populace by means of corruption, demolished the ancient fabrick, and erected on its ruins an absolute monarchy. He had also the address, amidst the most vehement struggles of faction, to leave to his sons a sovereignty equally despotick. The reigns of these Tyrants were short: and with their lives terminated the monarchichal government in Athens.

The Athenians, at this period, their spirits inflamed by vibrating factions, were exposed to all the evils of anarchy. Their country was yet destined to experience other fluctuations in its government. An Oligarchy was established by Pisander. It consisted of four hundred of the Nobles. The Athenians, by this Institution, were deprived of that anarchical liberty, to which they had been accustomed since the expulsion of the tyrants. By the brilliant talents, and under the guidance of Alcibiades, the people soon after were restored to the plenitude of their power. But this popular government was of short duration. For Lysander, the Spartan general, having obtained a victory over the Athenian fleet, took possession of Athens, and subverted the democratick authority. He instituted a new form of government, which consisted of a certain number of rulers: who are noticed in history by the title of the thirty tyrants.

Their

Their tyranny subsisted not long. The patriotism of Thrasybulus, and a peace which was obtained from Sparta, re-established on its ancient base the power of the people.

To ideas of tyranny, to which the Athenians had of late been inured, succeeded very opposite sensations. Such was the terror of the people lest despotism should be re-instated in Athens, that talents, if transcendant; and even those virtues which excite to an honourable glory, became the objects of their jealousy. Motives the most pure, and merit the most illustrious, at the instance of their Demagogues, were surveyed with distrust, and were frequently exposed to their arbitrary judgements. An avenue was thus opened to restless ambition. Faction was engendered in its wildest excesses: and that Demon of mischief continued its ravages until every vestige, and even the semblance of freedom had vanished from Athens.

The influx of luxury: the energy of her spirit converted from heroic ideas to a rage for theatrical amusements: an authority supreme, vested in a populace corrupt and inconstant, were the prominent features which marked the decadency of Athens: were the causes which emasculated the tone of her character: which extinguished every spark of patriot fire, or of Attic refinement; and which levelled with the dust the Athenian Republic.

Republic of Thebes.

THE political features in the Theban Republic, through a deficiency of incident, or of historical record, scarcely exhibit any prominent lines, or strength of character. It was to Epaminondas, and to his colleague Pelopidas, that this Republic was indebted for the distinction she attained, and for the brilliant though short-lived lustre she exhibited. No longer sustained by these animating springs, Thebes, on the death of those Heroes, reverted to her ancient obscurity. Agitated by faction, and corrupt in her manners, she fell an easy prey to the arms of Alexander the Great; and at length, with the other states of Greece, was swallowed in the vortex of Roman ambition.

Objects of importance now strike upon our view in the strongly depictured portraits of Carthage and of Rome. We shall remark on the striking defects, whether political or moral, which resulted from the Constitution or manners of each; and which tended to accelerate the decline, and to accomplish the destruction of those great and rival Republics.

Republic of Carthage.

THIS Republic derived her origin from a band of fugitives from Tyre, who established a settlement on the African coast. Transferring the genius of their country, into their new Settlements, the Tyrians were soon rendered opulent by commerce. Insolence on the one part, and jealousy on the other, excited, as was natural, a war between the Colonists and the natives of the country. The result of this war to Carthage was the subjugation of her enemies, and an enlarged extension of territory.

The constitution of Carthage was free, and was established on principles nearly similar to those of other infant Republics. Two supreme

supreme Magistrates were annually elected. The Senate and the people formed the body politic. A committee was also established, consisting of one hundred and four. It was the province of this Committee to keep a vigilant Eye on the conduct, and to repress every ambitious attempt of the opulent families. To this Tribunal, all the Commanders both by sea and by land were amenable. Out of this body of magistrates was formed a select Committee consisting of five members. Their office was for life, and they were vested with a most absolute authority. But the power of this tribunal became at length so oppresive, that its authority was reduced; its members were rendered elective, and the office was held only for one year. No law could be enacted in Carthage, unless the Senate were unanimous. A single veto took the question out of their hands, and gave the ultimate decision to the people. This appears to have been a radical and a striking defect in the constitution of Carthage.

It was to their genius for commerce, to their wealth, and to a wise direction of that wealth, that the Carthaginians were indebted for their early and extensive colonial acquisitions. Had they confined their views to commerce, to the interest which they possessed in their colonies, and to the maintenance of a naval force; they might not have excited the Jealousy of Rome; or, at least, they might have been enabled more effectually to check the designs of that potent and aspiring Republic. But with their wealth their insolence encreased, and a rage for war. Many evils were derived to Carthage from this desertion of her genius, and from the wild direction of her force to foreign and expensive conquests. Her navy was neglected;

lected, her wealth was squandered in subsidies: and enormous sums were expended in the maintenance of foreign and mercenary troops.

The Romans, sensible of the advantage which was given them by their rival; exerted every effort to obtain a naval superiority. That ascendency on the sea, which after various struggles they had acquired in the first Punic war; they ever after strenuously maintained; and the Carthaginians found, when too late, in the event of the second Punic war, the fatal effects of their negligence.

Besides the causes already recited, there was another, and an immediate spring, which contributed to the ruin of Carthage. This effect resulted from the spirit of faction. Her councils were distracted, and her energies weakened by a rivalry for power in the Hannonian and Barcan families. These rival chiefs were Hanno and Hamilcar; the one able in the council, the other illustrious in the field. Hannibal that terror of the Romans, succeeded to the military genius of his father; and like him was exposed to all the destructive cabals fomented by Hanno. To the virulent spirit of that statesman, manifested by impeding the succours voted to Hannibal after the battle of Cannæ, may be ascribed, the ineffectual exertions of that hero, his fatal recal out of Italy, and the subsequent destruction of the Carthaginian empire.

It does not appear, that luxury had so deeply pervaded the citizens of Carthage, as to conspire with other causes in effecting the ruin of the Republic. If we except those factions, which are ever the concomitants of a Democratical government, it seems as if

Carthage had derived the demolition of her empire, not fo much from causes which were internal and remote, as from a spirit of jealousy, which her own ambition had excited in a rapacious and rival nation.

Republic of Rome.

THE government of Rome, as instituted by Romulus, consisted of a mixture of power; in the privileges of the people, in those vested in the Nobles, and in the Regal Institution. To the Patricians were confined the great employments of the State; to the Plebeians was allotted the power of electing magistrates, of enacting laws, and deciding on the propriety of war when proposed by the King. But the decrees of the people were not final, until they had received the sanction of the Senate. The monarchy established in Rome was elective, and was dependent on the voice of the people.

In the reign of Tullus Servilius a regular militia was established. He enjoined the Roman Citizens to give in upon oath a just valuation of their property. From this register he formed his plan. He divided the whole body of the people into six classes. The

disposition

disposition was such, that the expences of war should fall upon those who were the most enabled to support its pressure; but then, as a recompence to the Nobles, he altered the system for collecting the suffrages. Heretofore the people had voted by Curiæ; but their suffrages were now gathered by Centuries. This change turned the scale in favour of the opulent.

Tarquin forced his way to the throne. So absolute was the power of that Prince, and so oppressive his tyranny both on the Patricians and Plebeians, that a coalition ensued; which terminated in the expulsion of the Tyrant, and in the abolition of Monarchy.

Aristocracy was erected on the ruins of the Regal Institution. Two consuls were appointed, vested with monarchical authority: whose office was annual and elective. But though chosen by the people, that popular privilege was delusive, and their power unsubstantial. For as the votes were taken by centuries, the Patricians governed the election of the Consuls.

Thus was the constitution of Rome sunk into an oligarchy. Its effects at length became so tyrannical, that two laws were enacted with the view of re-instating the people in their ancient authority. The citizens tyrannised over by their creditors, demanded also an abolition of their debts. To elude, or to crush this demand, a Dictator was appointed, vested with an absolute power. The Plebeians, versatile and ignorant of the importance of that power, not only conceded to the Patricians, but ratified also the nomination they had made.

The

The terror diffused by the arbitrary powers of a Dictator; silenced the turbulent, and smothered the public discontents. Supported by so despotic an authority, the Senate decreed that the debts of the people should not be cancelled. But this affair was urged into an immediate decision, by an unforeseen and extraordinary incident.

A debtor presented himself in the Forum, and implored the protection of the people. In his visage, and on his body appeared every mark expressive of bondage and cruelty. The exhibition of the man, and his impressive harangue, excited in the populace sensations of fury. To calm the tumult the senate decreed, that no Roman Citizen, who enlisted, should be liable to the demands of his creditor, while the army remained in the field.

The people again refused to enroll unless their debts were abolished. A Dictator was appointed to repel the storm. This magistrate calmed the rising spirit of the populace by an assurance of the redress of their grievances. The citizens crowded to his standard, and a victory was obtained in consequence.

The relief from Creditors, ſo recently promised, was afterwards refused by the Senate; and the first *Secession* ensued. Alarmed at its novelty, that assembly sent a deputation to the people, with an assurance, that the grievances complained of respecting their debts should be redressed. Another requisition was made. The Seceders demanded that a magistracy should be appointed, taken from the body of the citizens; whose peculiar function it should be to

repreſent

represent the Plebeians, and to be stationed as the guardians of their rights. The demand was acceded to, and the Tribunitial power was established.

This Institution fixed the æra of Republican liberty in Rome. Since the abolition of the Regal power, Aristocracy had obtained the ascendant; but the introduction of the Tribunes, at least for a time, threw into the scale a counterpoise weight, more equally to balance the government.

Accessions of privilege flowed on the people. They not only participated with the Patricians in the dignities of the State; but the decrees likewise enacted in their Assembly by tribes, were confirmed to be equally binding with those which were made by Centuries in the Assembly of the Nobles, The detestable law of subjecting the debtor to servitude, and to the cruelty of his creditor, was repealed. Two additional laws were enacted. The one, that the decrees made by the Plebeians should be equally obligatory on the Patricians; the other, that all laws, enacted in the Senate, should be laid before the assembly of the people for a final decision. This last decree was fatal to Aristocracy, and threw a preponderating weight into the popular scale.

To preserve an equilibrium in the State, between factions thus incessantly vibrating, a *third Estate* was essentially necessary: which might have acted as a barrier against both with a controlling and permanent authority. No such barrier having been established, the floodgates

floodgates were opened to political and private depravity; which in a short period of time, burst upon the Roman Republic in a rapid and irresistible torrent.

Extensive conquests, and the luxury introduced in consequence, corrupted their manners, and extinguished in the people every masculine virtue. The love of his Country, the characteristic of a Roman, gradually vanished; and the Soldier licentious, and not controlled by any principle, was only attached to the cause of a general, who courted his favour, or who gratified his rapacity. A total dereliction of religious ideas, had a tendency to create, and to diffuse through the mass the universal depravity. Liberty in Rome degenerated into the most outragious licentiousness. The minds of the people vitiated and corrupt, were prepared for changes the most tremendous and fatal. Their inflammable spirits were easily set on fire by ambitious and virulent leaders. The horrible conflicts between Marius and Sylla, the terrifick proscriptions of the first and second Triumvirate, inflamed the spirit and inverted the genius of Rome: the clement, though daring usurpation of Cæsar, reduced into a system the bondage of the people: the calm though determined policy of the saturnine Augustus rivetted their chains.*

We have thus delineated in the outlines of character, the prominent features which distinguished these ancient Republics. We have noticed

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* The outlines of these strictures on the Ancient Republics have been principally taken from the reflections of Wortley Montague Esq.

noticed the springs which raised them into splendour: the leading causes which sunk them into ruin. We presume, therefore, to hazard the following positions. The historic page we trust will ratify their truth: that corruption of manners, the desertion of original principles: that a Constitution radically imperfect, or which had been injured by time, were the springs of their decay, and the causes of their ruin: that no stable felicity resulted from their governments, such were their political and moral defects: that, however splendid they appear, when seen through a classical medium, yet such were their elementary principles, that scarcely one of those ancient Republics was framed into a well constituted system, or was erected upon a solid foundation.

Republic of Venice.

THE Venetian Republic, as the child of adversity, derived its origin from sources nearly similar to those of Carthage and of Rome. The great outlines of her character, those the most prominent and masculine, bear a striking resemblance to the features which distinguished, or which disgraced those celebrated States. She concentred in her genius, whatever were the grand objects of each; and she pursued them with an ardor, like theirs, destructive and useful.

We shall commence the abstract of this singalar Republic, at the period, when various bands of fugitives, urged by the inroads of the Goths, abandoned their abodes on the continent of Italy; and on a cluster of barren Islands situated in the Adriatic, laid the foundations of an Empire; which, rising by degrees into eminence, in arts and in arms, subsisted through the lapse of ages the first maritime power, and the bulwark of Europe. We shall narrate with brevity the origin, and the striking fluctuations of her government.

Consuls appear to have directed the public affairs in the dawn of this insulated State. The dominion of the Consuls was of short duration. The power of the Tribunes was next established. These were elected every year in each of the Islands which comprised the city of Venice. The jurisdiction of each was distinct; but yet they all were amenable to the General Assembly of the people. No system of polity, more strongly than this, can mark the features of genuine Democracy.

The ambition of the Tribunes, and their turbulent spirit, disgusted the people, and their power was abolished. Oppressed by multiplied rulers, and acting from the spur of consequent evils, the citizens, with a wild and natural transition, rushed into despotism. A magistrate was appointed with the title of Duke,* in whom was vested the most absolute authority. Oppressed again by this plenitude of power, the Venetians soon abolished the sovereign dignity. A magistrate was then appointed, termed *Maestre de Soldat*,† and annually elected. This appointment was suppressed in the fifth year of its institution. The people next with a versatile spirit, re-established the Ducal authority. During this singular rotation, anarchy had presided in Venice in all its wildest excesses.

The Ducal dignity, thus re-instated, so sovereign and arbitrary, continued through the lengthened succession of thirty-four Doges. But an evil sprung up, during that period, which more deeply plunged the

* Doge.

† Commander of the Soldiers.

the Venetians in misery, and rivetted more closely their chains. This evil arose from the privilege, assumed by the Doges, and granted by the people, of associating in the government their sons or their brothers. Intolerable was the misery which resulted to the citizens from their inadvertant concessions. Indignant at its pressure, they often retorted upon their Sovereigns the cruelties which they suffered; and dire were the conflicts, and dreadful the carnage which were stimulated by these infuriated factions. Such were the struggles between anarchy and despotism. An essential spring was wanting, in the Constitutional polity of Venice, to counteract this exasperated spirit. An intermediate Estate had not as yet been established. The Grand Council, when instituted, had a tendency to produce the effect, by forming a kind of balancing power, between the assumptions of the Doges, and the claims of the people.

It undertook the arduous task of rectifying evils, which primeval defects, or which corruption in the current of time had introduced. It continued the Ducal office, though divested of its power, and only to exist as a pageant of State. This Council, which as yet combined the rights of citizens and Nobles, produced for a time, a more equal and perhaps a better regulated government. In this state the Republic remained, comparatively tranquil, until the Grand Revolution; when by a single political blow, every vestige of popular freedom was stricken from its centre.

This Revolution, ever memorable to Venice, was the work of the Doge Pietro Gradenigo. Ambition, or revenge, or political sagacity, impelled him to the enterprize. Heretofore elective, the

Grand

Grand Council was rendered perpetual: heretofore an assembly composed of nobles and citizens: to the one Order was attached, the full authority of the State, as an hereditary privilege: to the other Order a disinherison of rights ensued, and a total exclusion from power. Thus was destroyed the regulating spring. Palsied by the change, the people sunk into nerveless insignificance: the nobles in consequence were raised into plenitude of power; entrenched within the lines of an invincible and rigid Aristocracy. The institution of the Council of Ten, all terrific as it was, completed the tyranny.

The Republic of Venice in her varying forms may be thus discriminated.

Comprising a term of 270 years. Her infancy was under the direction of Consuls and Tribunes.

470 years Her Youth, through a lengthened period, felt the stern pressure of Ducal domination.

125 years. The advancing period of her Youth, under a more Republican influence, was governed by the General Assembly.

811 years. Her vigour of life was matured under the tyranny of Nobles.

Her

Her old age commenced, at that memorable Epoch, the close of the war of Cambray.*

The remainder of her existence has only been marked by gra-
288 years dual decay: by that increasing debility, and that lassitude of spirit, which, whether in Men or in Nations, portend dissolution.

Whatever the defects were in the system of this once illustrious Republic, she has certainly enjoyed the peculiar distinction, of maintaining her State, independent of foreign domination, much longer than any of the most celebrated Republics of Antiquity.

But in every point of view, when we search for a well regulated freedom in Venice, whether we search for it in its wild anarchical state, when fettered by Ducal oppression, or by the rigid domination of Nobles, we still survey it as an image delusive and horrible: exhibiting to the eye, nothing more than the *Phantom* of Liberty. We still must remark in the Polity of Venice: in its predominating genius, a principle destructive to human felicity: a defection from the spirit of that delegated trust, bestowed by Providence on Man, as the most invaluable of secondary blessings.

* See Hist. du Gouv. de Venise, par Amelot de la Houssaie, tom 1. p. 4.

Monarchy of Britain.

FROM the wild excesses incident to popular governments: from the tyranny inherent in man, when vested with the plenitnde of power, it is with peculiar complacency we turn, with a degree of reverential regard, to the limited monarchy of Britain.

This wisely devised System, in the rudiments of government, is indebted for its origin, to the simple thoughwell adjusted polity of our Saxon Ancestors. The like elementary principles in jurisprudence and in policy, which distinguished their liberal institutions, distinguish at this period, the complicated, and more refined texture of the British Constitution.

The government of Britain, it may be said, bears a more striking resemblance to that of Sparta, than to any of the Systems, which were incident to the other Republics of Antiquity.

The

The executive authority in Britain is vested in an individual; considered as supreme, and as forming the first and most illustrious branch of the State. Under the title of King, he possesses the Regal authority for life. And as the sovereignty flows in regular succession, that succession is not attended by a spirit of faction, or by those tumultuary proceedings, which are the natural consequences of an elective monarchy; or which were incident in Rome to the annual appointment of Consuls. The executive power, being one and indivisible in Britain, is not liable to that jarring of interests, and that rivalry for power; which were inseparable from the combined authority; and which were fatally evinced in the government of Sparta. By virtue of the prerogative vested in the crown as the fountain of honour, are created those flattering distinctions; which, rising in fine gradation of rank, exhibit to the people an incentive to virtue; and which give to the State its grace, its stability, and solid consistence. Besides the protection resulting from the King, as the Reservoir, the dispenser of Justice; the monarch himself is obliged to govern his subjects in conformity to the laws.* With the promptitude and vigour incident to the Regal Institution; with the secrecy and union which distinguish its councils; with the powers it possesses, paramount and restrictive, yet circumscribed in extent; with its prerogative of mercy, that attribute of Heaven; it forms besides, a graceful entablature, an ornamental point upon the summit of the political pyramid.

The

* Blackstone, vol 1. p. 233, 234, 266

The Spartan Senate was established, it is true, as a *third Estate*. It was intended as a barrier, fixed and restrictive, between the other constituent authorities. But being elected by the people, its radical source; it is more than probable, that by the force of a too powerful attraction, it might have been occasionally drawn from its primary centre. If the conjecture be solid, then an evil resulted in natural consequence. If the Senate, in yielding to that will of the people, from whence they derived their existence, had ever deserted their barrier point, their central station; they must then have loosened the connecting chain, have broken the springs of that equipoised system, the permanency of which had been the evident aim of Lycurgus.

The Nobles of Britain, when they are assembled in parliament, give to the Constitution a striking advantage. Equally with that of Sparta, they form an intermediate Estate; but then their Estate is vested with a privilege important, and unknown to the Spartan Assembly. Their honours being hereditary, and flowing in a lineal descent, they constitute an Assembly politically permanent; and with the exception of certain restraints, it may be said, that they exist independent of control. In addition to a privilege so essential, they are to be considered as the bulwarks of the Crown, its hereditary Counsellors; and are liable to be summoned by the King, on solemn and urgent occasions, to assist him with their wisdom, and to support him by their valour. Another privilege there is, sovereign in its nature, and incident to this illustrious *Order*. It forms a court of Judicature paramount to, and corrective of all other tribu-

nals; to the wisdom and justice of which all civil rights upon appeal are referred for a final decission. Fixed as a spring in the centre of the State, a balancing power, they are enabled to combine all its parts, to control the excesses of either; and likewise to act with an efficient decission on the spur of the moment, whenever public emergencies call for their energy.* †

The Representatives of the people, as a Scyon from their stock, constitutes a *third* and very essential Estate. The members who compose it, are elected by the people, and periodically are dependent on their suffrages. Equally energetic, as is the Assembly of the Lords, this Estate is vested with powers more enlarged and restrictive.‡ Though the members are condensed, which participate in the legislative counsels; they yet secure to the people every solid advantage

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* The truth of this Assertion has been evinced in two memorable instances. The one was, when the Nobles of England in support of the Royal Cause, environed the unfortunate Charles the 1st. in a kind of political entrenchment; independent of, and in opposition to the Commons, the Representatives of the people. The other was, when the English Nobility at the glorious Revolution, with ideas very opposite, and in conjunction with the Commons, nobly asserted the British Constitution, and formed into a system the great outlines of its freedom. In the Rebellions which have subsequently occurred, they have likewise manifested with an efficient promptitude, their courage, their loyalty, and their patriotism.

† Blackstone, vol. 1, p. 227, 228.

‡ The power of witholding supplies, and the privilege that all money bills must originate with the Commons.

advantage, which an equality in interests suggests, or which superior cultivation, or intellect bestow. To the Representative system are attached other peculiar advantages. It enables the mass of the people in a rational, and perhaps in the only effectual degree, virtually to share in the framing of laws, which are to govern their conduct, and which are equally coercive upon all. It avoids, on the discussion of important concerns, that vehemency of spirit, those tumultuary proceedings, which are incident to, and which often disgrace or frustrate the designs of, popular assemblies. And in consequence it does not consign the decission of points which are intricate, and essential to the srfety of a nation; to the caprices, or to the passions of an unreflecting and undisciplined populace. Alike the guardians of the people, as were the Tribunes of the Romans, or the Ephori of Sparta, the British Representatives, circumscribed as they are and collectively considered, have no other interests to pursue than the interests of the nation. But the Roman Tribunes, or the Ephori of Sparta, although created at the will of the people, yet often tyrannised over that will, under subtle pretences while aiming at personal ambition: often engendered sedition, and convulsed their country, by rendering the people, who were the very springs of their power, the instrument of their views, and the engine of their force.

It may not be irrevelant to the subject should we here adduce an extract from Polybius.

The best form of government, says that intelligent writer, "is "that which is composed of a due admixture of Monarchy, Aristocracy,

"tocracy, and Democracy." He introduces the Spartan Republic as an instance in point. He adds also, "that to perpetuate the dura-"tion of his government, Lycurgus united the peculiar excellencies "of all the best governments, in one form; that neither of the "three parts, by swelling beyond its just bounds, might ever be able "to deviate into its original inborn defects; but that, whilst each "power was mutually drawn back, by the opposite attraction of "the other two, neither power might ever preponderate: but the "balance of government continue suspended in its true equipoise."

In the polity of Britain are comprised all that nice adjustment, those balancing checks in the constituted powers, which were so wisely defined by Polybius. So equally poised, so maturely digested is the system, that any one of its parts possesses energies distinct, and sufficiently cogent to curb in the others their eccentrical movements; or when all its springs are acting in unison, it has powers to set in motion the political machine, and to give it activity, spirit, and vigour.

Thus have we sketched in the great outlines of character, the Constitution of Britain. We survey it as a system, which has been sanctioned by the experience of ages; as a polity, which in every instance of solid utility,* is paramount to all other systems of government.

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* The trial of the subject by his peers, the freedom of the press, the independent situation of the judges, and the Habeas Corpus Act, are privileges incident, perhaps, to no other form of monarchical government.

trament. We have seen it rejecting, as far as human wisdom could devise, every radical defect: attracting within its centre whatever is excellent in government:* from that centre have we seen it largely dispensing to man, whatever is valuable in freedom: whatever is conducive to his rational felicity. Modelled on the plan of Polybius, it has transfused its spirit into the image which he formed: has realized into beneficial effect, the abstract ideas of that philosophick and enlightened historian.

Such are the forms, and such is the spirit, of the Constitutional polity of Britain. Its preservation will depend on the maintenance of original principles; on preserving in the State thrt well poised system, which wisdom framed at a memorable æra: at an æra, when the genius of Freedom rekindled from its ashes; when the Constitution of Britain, more equally proportioned, and wisely digested, was erected on a stable foundation: at an æra, when the Prerogatives of the Monarch,† when the Rights of the Subject, those Rights alone which are rational, were not only precisely defined, but were fixed on the solid basis of laws, equally coercive, liberal, and equitable.

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* But more especially in three grand instances, which comprise the essence of civil immunities; the right of of personal security, the right of personal liberty, and the right of private property., See Blackstone's Comment. vol 1, p, 129.

† These prerogatives stretch not to the doing of any wrong; and entrench no farther on our *natural*. than what is expedient for the maintenance of our *civil* liberties. Blackstone vol. 1, p. 237, 238.

To sustain this system inviolate, unextinguished and pure as the Vestal Fire, ought to be the anxious thought, and the ardent exertion—but it ought to be the utmost limit, of Patriotism.

FINIS

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